



Ad Astra Poetry Project
By Denise Low, Kansas Poet Laureate

WILLIAM C. KLOEFKORN (1932 -)

In 1972, Windflower Press published William Kloefkorn's first book *Alvin Turner as Farmer*, which became a regional best seller. The publisher, Ted Kooser, later became U.S. Poet Laureate, and Kloefkorn became lifetime poet laureate for Nebraska in 1982.

Kloefkorn's verse, written in vernacular language, celebrates Great Plains life. He is one of the first writers, along with Kooser and others, to define a Midwestern voice. Born, raised, and educated in Kansas, he often writes about rural life with understated wit.

Kloefkorn is especially a storyteller. In this poem about Kansas character Carry Nation, he tells history from a young person's point of view. Contrasts invigorate the story: the "full-fleshed" photograph breaks the wallpaper pattern. Mrs. Wilma Hunt sermonizes about morality as she destroys life. The devil appears, but then is set aside for Kool-Aid. The poet's dead-pan delivery suggests a third presence: the open-eared listener who observes details, judges a tad, and chuckles at the absurd human condition—like an adult reader.

LTL

Carry A. Nation came into our house and filled it
With her meagerness. She was hung full-fleshed
Against the flowered wallpaper of our living-room,
And Mrs. Wilma Hunt, who brought her, gave each
Of us a little wooden hatchet. "John Barleycorn
Is the Devil," Mrs. Wilma Hunt said. And
by dropping worms head-
First into alcohol she taught us
To hate him. "Now let me tell
You," she said, "about the LTL...."

She taught us the Loyal
Temperance Legion song, all of it, then killed
Another worm and served refreshments. Our house
Had never been so full. There were all of us, with
Carry on the wall-
Paper: Kool-Aid, Cookies, Song,
Something-New-to-Hate
And several dead worms
Curled in alcohol.

Education: William Kloefkorn, was born in Attica, Kansas. He received a BA
1954 in English from Emporia State University and then served in the U.S.
Marines. In 1956 he taught high school in Ellinwood, then returned to ESU for
the MA (1958).

Career: Nebraska named Kloefkorn the State Poet, the equivalent of state poet
laureate. He taught at Wichita State from 1958-1962 and Nebraska Wesleyan
University from 1962 to 1997. He is active as a writer and performer of
poetry. His books—over two dozen—include poetry, fiction, memoir, fiction, and
children’s literature.

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